Aspects of Buddhism in Indian History

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Aspects of Buddhism in Indian History

I. Discovery of the Buddhist Heritage

Today India is again appearing on the Buddhist map of the world. Indians are awakening to their Buddhist past. In the second half of the nineteenth century—thanks to western and Indian archaeologists and orientalists—Indians began to be surprised at the discovery of the Buddhist legacy. To talk of a "revival of Buddhism" in modern India is right in this sense of the discovery of the Buddhist heritage by Indians. Even today, 199 years after the foundation of the Asiatic Society, 81 years after the foundation of the Mahā Bodhi Society of India, 71 years after the foundation of the Archaeological Survey of India, the process of the discovery of Buddhism in India is still going on. There is no doubt about it that much good work has been done in recent decades to disseminate some knowledge about Buddhism among those who care to know or those who can read and write. But the number of those who care to know is small and of those who cannot read or write is very large and much literary and educational work remains to be done in order to give a glimpse of the wonder that was Buddhism in the Indian sub-continent before the Muslim invasions.

The year 2500 of the Buddhist Era (1956 CE) was of far-reaching importance and historic consequences for Buddhism in India. On the one hand, the celebration of *Buddhajayanti* on an international scale, organised by the central government and by state governments may be considered as symbolic of the express acknowledgement by modern Indians of their profound debt to the Buddhist tradition. On the other hand, the government's enthusiasm and involvement in the year-long celebrations were perhaps indicative of its respect for the universal ideas and principles taught by the Buddha. The government also took upon itself the task of renovating sacred Buddhist monuments and making the Buddhist centres of religion and culture accessible to pilgrims and tourists. An important portion of Buddhist literature in Pali and Sanskrit has been published under the patronage of the government since 1956. A few learned institutions have been financed to promote Buddhist Studies and this branch of study is now recognised in its own right. A number of universities in the country provide facilities for study and research in Pali, Tibetan, Buddhist Sanskrit and in art and archaeology of Buddhism. The Mahā Bodhi Society, in spite of its meagre resources, has been trying to keep up the tradition of *bahujana hitāya bahujana-sukhāya* ('for the welfare and happiness of many people.'). The Indo-Japanese Friendship Society has been displaying rare interest in the task of promoting good-will and peace through the construction of Buddhist shrines. Much good work has been done by the neo-Buddhists in Mahārāshtra and other parts of India.

Most important of all there is now a sizable number of professed Buddhists in the mixed population of India. The number has been increasing since 1956. The Buddhists in modern India are a mixed group and in some sense truly representative of the wide variety of practises and beliefs characteristic of Buddhism that is universal. First of all should be mentioned the *Buddhists by tradition*, those who have inherited the Buddhist religion from their ancestors. They are generally found in Orissa, Bengal, on the Indo-Nepal border in northern districts of Himachal Pradesh and in Ladakh. Next come the neo-Buddhists, the followers of B. R. Ambedkar and others, who have embraced Buddhism from time to time after renouncing their status as *harijāns*. They form the largest section of the Buddhist population and are generally wedded to the *Theravāda* tradition. The third group of Buddhists consists of those who have grown into Buddhist religiousness through education, conviction and consideration: Buddhists in this group have come from different strata of society, ex-*Brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas, vaiṣvas,*

kāyasthas and so on. Men like the late Dharmānanda Kosambi, the late Rāhula Saṃkrityāyana and Bhikṣu Jagadiṣ Kāṣyap belong to this group. The fourth group of Buddhists consists of *non-Indian Buddhists resident in India*. These include over fifty thousand Tibetans headed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There are some Buddhist families and monks from almost all Asian lands and also a few from Europe.

India continues to be respected as the holy land of the Dharma by all devout Buddhists the world over. Educated Indians too are now aware of India's Buddhist past and her cultural contacts with other Asian peoples. There is however no organisation on an all-India level nor any other kind of liaison among the different sections of the Buddhist population. There seems to be, for example, no contact between professional Buddhist scholars and the Buddhist masses of modern India. The organisation of monastic life is practically non-existent; the *bhikṣu-saṃgha*, it seems, is nobody's concern. Of all the sections of the Indian people, Buddhists are the poorest. There is a clear dearth of Buddhist monks in the country. Educated and trained bhikṣus, versed in Dharma lore, are greatly needed. But there are no material resources, no Buddhist schools, no good monasteries or temples or funds or rich donors to maintain and take care of Buddhist monks. In most parts of the country it is difficult to come across a bhikṣu. The lonely families of lay Buddhists have to carry on their religious activities often without the presence of monks.

The individual families of lay Buddhists as well as individual Buddhist monks, living in different parts of the country, are in fact facing a cultural and religious crisis due to the absence of an organised community of workers and an established Saṃgha. So long as the absence of able leadership, proper education, necessary funds and organisational liaison among all scattered sections of the Buddhist population on a countrywide scale continues to exist, I have grave doubts about the prospects for the progress of Buddhist thought, culture and literature in India.

There is also the other side of the situation in which Buddhism finds itself in contemporary India. This is its relationship with the tradition of the majority of Indians who are called "Hindus." The Buddhists, especially the neo-Buddhists, will continually have to seek the goodwill and sympathy of the followers of *Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism, Sāktism* and of *Vedāntic* "Hinduism." Due respect for the faith of others has been a cardinal feature of the Buddhist tradition. No true Buddhist can afford to disparage the religious beliefs and practises of others. Emperor Aśoka commanded, some three and twenty centuries ago, that "There should not be honour to one's own religion or condemnation of another's without any occasion, or it may be a little on this and that occasion. By so doing one promotes one's own Dhamma, and benefits another's too. By doing otherwise one harms both his own and also another's religion. One who honours his own and condemns another's Dhamma, all that through attachment to his own religion—why?in order to illuminate it. But in reality, by so doing, he only harms it, to be sure. Concourse (*samavāya*) therefore, is commendable (*sādhu*)—why?in order that people may hear and desire to hear one another's Dhamma (Rock Edict XIV)."

In these days of the encounter of the religions of the world this teaching of Aśoka has a special relevance. India has always been a multi-religious nation. Brāhmaṇism, Jainism and Buddhism existed and flourished side by side for many centuries. The tradition of religious tolerance was violated especially by Brāhmaṇical followers only occasionally, till Islam appeared on the scene. Sectarian fanaticism and religious intolerance unfortunately characterised the mediaeval history of India, and incalculable harm was done to the true ideals of religiousness. Today the government of the country is wedded to a secular policy so that the votaries of different faiths are free to pursue and promote all that is best in their respective faiths. But even under a secular government the position of Buddhism remains the weakest, for its followers are among the poorest and most disorganised. The vast majority of neo-Buddhists

are, by and large, illiterate and ignorant about the real nature and significance of Buddhism. Only by sustained and stupendous efforts can we overcome these weaknesses.

As a matter of fact, revival or promotion of Buddhism in modern India is possible only through education and creative literary publications of a high standard. Ignorance or *avijjā* in any form is incompatible with the Buddhist message. The Buddha is the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. The path of Buddhahood is a path of wisdom (*ñāṇa-magga*). Propagation and progress of Buddhism in ancient Asia was due to a large extent to its missionaries who were not only pious men but often vastly learned. The amount of sacred books and the great number of languages in which they were written by ancient and mediaeval Buddhists testify to the Buddhist emphasis on education and learning.

II. The Brāhmaṇical Attitude towards Buddhism

Further progress in the development of Buddhism in modern India depends to some extent upon the attitude of Brāhmaṇical "Hindus" towards Buddhism and its followers. The importance of this attitude can scarcely be exaggerated in view of the past history of the relationship between Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism.

The attitude of modern Indian intellectuals and national leaders towards Buddhism may be described as "traditional" and "apologetic." It is traditional because its upholders view Buddhism from the standpoint of their own (Brāhmaṇical) tradition which they style "orthodox." Buddhism from this standpoint is regarded as "heterodox." Another reason for calling this attitude "traditional" is that it has been handed down traditionally from the time of the *Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas*. Briefly speaking, the Purāṇas treat the Buddha as a heretical teacher of Vedic culture; Lord Viṣṇu himself, they teach, assumed the form of the Buddha and taught Buddhism. Modern Indian intellectuals hailing from the Brāhmaṇical Hindu tradition have accepted this view of the Purāṇas, although they perhaps do not subscribe to the Purāṇic view that the *Buddha-avatāra* of Viṣṇu was a delusive phantom and Buddhism a trick to mislead the "demons." They want to interpret their ancient heritage and history in the light of its higher doctrines associated with Buddhism and the *Vedānta* of Saṃkara's school. There is a tendency to trace all the great and sublime elements of modern "Hinduism" to the Vedic tradition. As a result of this tendency an attempt has been made in modern Indian works dealing with Indian religions, philosophies and culture to vindicate Vedic or Indo-Āryan origins of the dominant ideas in Indian civilization. It is worthy of remark here that modern "Hindu" intellectuals, generally speaking, do not share the Brāhmaṇical hostility towards Buddhism which characterised ancient and mediaeval centuries of religious history in India. Following the Purāṇas, they accept Buddhism as a part of their Brāhmaṇical heritage, but unlike the authors of the Purāṇas, they regard the Buddha as genuinely the greatest "maker of modern Hinduism." The greatness of the Buddha is recognised, and the role of Buddhism in Indian history and culture, though never scientifically and completely investigated or estimated, is generally appreciated. The contributions of Buddhism to Indian art and literature, religion and philosophy, mysticism and morals, are unequalled and one cannot overlook them. Indian intellectuals, therefore, justly take pride in acknowledging and praising the Buddha and his legacy. This pride is a part of their heritage conceived traditionally. "Refined Brāhmaṇism" or "modern Hinduism" would not possibly have come into existence without acknowledging the Buddha and assimilating Buddhism. In this fashion the traditional attitude becomes strongly eclectic and syncretistic from the standpoint of the Hindus.

Some of the greatest names in modern Indian history can be associated with this "traditional" understanding of Buddhism and its relationship with Brāhmaṇism or "Hinduism." One can see

the strong influence of the Buddha's personality and of the Buddhist legacy on Sri Rāmakrishna, Swāmi Vivekānanda, Rabindranāth Tagore, Asutosh Mookerjee, Sri Aurobindo, Mahātma Gandhi, Ānanda Coomaraswāmy, Jawaharlāl Nehru, Vinobā Bhāve, S. Rādhakrishnan, Kaka Kalelkār and others. One can enumerate scores of other distinguished artists, poets, writers and social workers of modern India who have been inspired by Buddhist ideals and ideas. All these leaders, scholars and men of letters have praised the Buddha and Buddhism in magnificent terms. They have resented that Buddhism declined in India; they have re-affirmed the Buddhist tradition of religious tolerance; they have criticised the existence of those very customs and institutions in their own tradition which were criticised first by the Buddha and the Buddhists. The caste system, priestly laws, feudal customs, untouchability, social disabilities of women and the like, all these elements of traditional Brāhmaṇical heritage have been attacked and reformed, at least in theory. The name of the Buddha is cited as an authority in support of modern social reforms. The Buddha is the source of religious authority for abolishing casteism and untouchability. There is no sanction in the Vedic scriptures for this reform. The constitution of the Indian Republic is thus inspired by the message of the Buddha.

The secular government also seeks to respect the faiths of all Indians whosoever they may be. The 'wheel of righteousness' (*dhammacakka*) on the national flag of India is a symbol of the universality of the Buddha's message of wisdom and compassion. The ideals of religious tolerance and social justice taught and practised by Emperor Aśoka, have found their permanent approval on Indian soil. The official seal of the government contains Aśokan symbols of the beating of the drum of righteousness (*dhammaghosa*) in all the four quarters the world, symbolised by the roaring lions facing the directions and surmounted by the sacred 'wheel' (*cakka*). It is also worthy of note that the motto inscribed on the official seal of the government of India, *satyaṃ eva jayate*, "truth alone is victorious," is also of *Śramaṇic* origin preserved in a text attributed to the "shaven-headed ones", the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad* (III. 16). One of the epithets given to the Buddha by Vedic Brāhmaṇas was *muṇḍaka*. The contemptuous sense attached to this word in the age of the Buddha has long since vanished from the tradition. For enlightened modern "Hindus" the Dhammapada is perhaps as venerable a scripture as the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*. Indian universities and scholars have been publishing standard and sub-standard books in English, Hindi and other provincial languages on Buddhist subjects for over fifty years now. Indeed, the amount of literature on Buddhism produced and published by modern Indians is tremendous, and the work is continuing. All this is a proof of their interest in and respect for the Buddhist heritage albeit understood as a part of the Brāhmaṇical heritage.

There is however a fundamental confusion deeply involved in this attitude of modern "Hindu" intellectuals. This confusion is partly rooted in the historical fusion of Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism that took place during the first millennium of the Christian era. During this period the Brāhmaṇas and other leaders of the Brāhmaṇical society declared the Buddha the ninth *avatāra* of God and assimilated many cardinal elements of Buddhist culture. This remarkable cultural feat was achieved by the authors of the *Purāṇas*. This deliberate fusion or rapprochement between Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism was later on forgotten, and a confusion developed, which resulted in the identification of the two religious traditions. Only a vague memory remained, and in this Buddhism came to be treated as a "heretical" and "atheistic" branch of Brāhmaṇism.

Modern scholars have however pushed the origin of this confusion further back to the time of the Buddha. They believe that even at the time of its origin Buddhism was a "heresy" within Brāhmaṇism. Here the "apologetic" attitude comes in full force. A class of Vedic texts called *Upaniṣads* is believed to be the source of Buddhist doctrines. This has become almost an authoritative dogma with modern intellectuals of India. To discuss and analyse the composite character and hybrid origin of the *Upaniṣads* is nothing short of a "heresy" in "traditional"

Indology. The official theory of the origins of Buddhism, which governs the "traditional" attitude of modern Indian historians and intellectuals, is that it was a kind of "protest" against Vedicism and a reform upon old Brāhmaṇism. We will quote the views of three of the most important of modern Brāhmaṇical "Hindus", who may be said to represent their "reformed" tradition at its best. Swāmi Vivekānanda says: "Do not mistake, Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism … Buddhism is one of our sects."[1] "He (i.e. the Buddha) taught the very gist of the philosophy of the Vedas."[2] S. Rādhakrishnan observes, "Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus, perhaps a schism or a heresy."[3] "The Buddha utilised the Hindu inheritance to correct some of its expressions."[4] P. V. Kane, the greatest modern Indian scholar of the Brāhmaṇical tradition, says that the Buddha was only a great reformer of the Hindu religion as practised in his time.[5]

These statements are representative of the general opinion prevalent in Brāhmaṇical "Hindu" circles of present day India. Buddhism is sought to be re-interpreted theistically in terms of *Upaniṣadic* doctrines. The Buddha is brought to the Brāhmaṇical fold again after the manner of the *Purāṇas*. This development, in our view, may prove dangerous for the progress and understanding of Buddhism in modern India. It has influenced not only the writing of ancient Indian history but also the interpretation of Buddhist principles. Swāmi Vivekānanda, one of the most influential teachers of modern "Hinduism", tells us that Buddhist doctrines did not attract him at all. Although his writings and speeches are full of Buddhist doctrines, he is said to have stated the following: "All my life I have been very fond of Buddha, but not of his doctrine."[6] This seems to be an attitude characteristic of many other Indians who write on and talk about Buddhism frequently. Addressing some Americans in California in 1900, he remarked, "I do not understand his (i.e. Buddha's) doctrine—we Hindus never understood it."[7] This is a very honest confession and a profoundly revealing fact in so far as it throws the cat out of the bag. Modern leaders of eclectic, syncretistic and apologetic "Hinduism" scarcely reveal an awareness of the delicate difficulty in understanding the faith of other men. Those who have studied Pali texts or Mahāyāna Sūtras or texts of the school of Nāgārjuna or of Dignāga, even tend to overlook the flaws in this "traditional" approach, although they certainly know the differences between early Buddhism and Vedic Brāhmaṇism. They were not only the ancient and mediaeval Brāhmaṇa teachers who did not understand Buddhism; modern scholars born into the Brāhmaṇical tradition too have not shown any better understanding. Saṃkara, Kumārila, Udayana and Sāyaṇa-Mādhava did not understand Buddhism. This is true also of Tāgore, Gandhi, Coomaraswamy and Rādhakrishnan. The difference between these two groups is that the former was not confused by the fashion of eclecticism and the cliché of the "unity of religions" and that it had its roots deep in the Sanskrit tradition of the Brāhmaṇas.

Several modern leaders and intellectuals of "Hindu" India praise the Buddha perhaps for political reasons. Such admirers derive their socialist and communist doctrines from Buddhism.

All those who have tried to study Buddhist thought and culture from the standpoint of the Brāhmaṇical tradition may be said to have failed to understand Buddhism. They will have to shake off their "traditional" bias and "orthodox" attitude before they can impartially study the history of Buddhism and appreciate its essential thought patterns.

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[1] *Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda* (Māyāvatī Memorial Edition, 1964) Vol. IV, p. 135.
[2] Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 97.
[3] *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Ministry of Information, Government of India, New Delhi, 1959) p. XIII.
[4] Ibid. p. XV.
[5] *History of Dhammasāstra (B. O. R. L.,* Poona, 1962) Vol. V. Part 11, p. 1004.
[6] Op. cit. Vol. VIII. p. 103.
[7] Op. cit. Vol. III. p. 529.

It is curious to note however that our intellectuals and historians, in spite of their official theory and "traditional" attitude, also talk of the decline of Buddhism in India. On the one hand they believe that Buddhism was only a reformed version of Brāhmaṇism; on the other hand they believe that Buddhism made a complete exit from India. Only a few sophisticated scholars perceive the persistence of Buddhism in Neo-Brāhmaṇism or "Hinduism." Most of our scholars display a paradoxical and arbitrary behaviour in their treatment of the history of Buddhism in India. When they discuss the origin and development of Buddhism, when they write about the doctrines and practises of Buddhism, they maintain that all these elements already existed in the Vedic tradition. Buddhism, they ask us to believe, was not a new and independent religion. It was only a "reformed" or "refined" version of Brāhmaṇical "Hinduism." But when they see the material evidence of Brāhmaṇical opposition to and persecution of Buddhism in ancient and mediaeval literature and archaeology, and when they see that Buddhist monks, Buddhist families, Buddhist monasteries and libraries were wiped out from the Indian heartland and even the names of the Buddha and Aśoka had almost been forgotten by Indians, they conveniently find fault with Buddhist doctrines and their votaries. The causes of the decline of Buddhism in India are attributed either to Tāntrika practises or to the Muslim invasion, or to both. Nobody even imagines that if Buddhism were only a "reformed" or "refined" version of "Hinduism" how could it be said to have declined and died away while "Hinduism" is still flourishing and is the faith of the majority of Indians. Buddhism can be said to have declined only when there was evidence for its existence at a certain period in Indian history apart from the existence of "Hinduism." If Buddhism did not exist apart from Brāhmaṇism or "Hinduism", it did not die at all. A non-existent tradition or way of life does not die. The theory of the decline of Buddhism, from the standpoint of "traditional" history, is a false theory. On the other hand, if the decline of Buddhism in India was a historical fact, the theory of its origin as a "reformed" Brāhmaṇism is a false one and must be discarded.

III. Early Buddhism and Early Brāhmaṇism

Scholars who study early Buddhism from the "traditional" standpoint seek to emphasise two things. They concentrate on points of agreement between some *Upaniṣadic* tenets and a few elements of the early Buddhist teaching; they also insist on the chronological priority of at least two *Upaniṣads*, the *Chāndogya* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, over the Pali suttas. Since I have criticised this theory and pointed out its defects elsewhere,[8] I will not repeat my arguments here. I would, however, make some observations in brief.

When we speak of *early* Brāhmaṇism, we mean the Vedic religion and thought as a whole and not just *Upaniṣadic* Brāhmaṇism. The sources of early Brāhmaṇism include the *Saṃhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the oldest *Upaniṣads*. We must note that these *Upaniṣads* are minor texts of Vedic literature, appended at different dates, to this or that Brāhmaṇa or Āranyaka text belonging to a particular tradition of a *Saṃhitā*. Chronologically they are the latest of Vedic texts. These Upaniṣads did not enjoy such high prestige or authority in ancient India as they have earned in modern age since the time of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). The Dharmasūtras are generally opposed to their tenets. The commentaries of Saṃkara (cir. 900 CE) made them famous and authentic in mediaeval India. There is no evidence that the *Upaniṣads* were very influential in Brāhmaṇical circles before Gauḍapāda and Saṃkara, while there is evidence to prove that the pre- *Upaniṣadic* Vedic texts continued to be influential till the *Mahābhārata* established itself as the fifth Veda for the Kali Age. The religion and philosophy of the older

[8] See L. M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism* (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1970).

Upaniṣads formed a small and very late part of old Brāhmaṇism, and we are not justified in taking these texts as representatives of the whole of Vedic Brāhmaṇism.

I am one of those who consider the *Upaniṣads* as composite texts of different dates. In my opinion no *Upaniṣad* text can be proved to be pre-Buddhist in date, and the partial agreement between the Buddha's teachings and those of the early *Upaniṣads* is due to the fact that these Vedic texts were composed between the age of the Buddha and that of Aśoka.[9] I am aware that this opinion runs counter to the view generally held by Indologists. But I find no convincing proof for assigning even the earliest *Upaniṣads* to a period before 550 BCE. The language of the *Upaniṣads* does not by itself permit us to place them before that date. Some of these older *Upaniṣads* mention King Ajātasatru (Ajātasattu) and the Brāhmaṇa theologian Aśvalāyana (Assalāyana) who were contemporaries of Sākyamuni. The belief in the pre-Buddhist date of the *Upaniṣads* seems to rest entirely on "traditional" fancy.[10] Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Brāhmaṇism of these early *Upaniṣads* is different, to a great extent, from the Brāhmaṇism of the pre-*Upaniṣadic* Vedic texts, on the one hand, and from that of the *Purāṇas* and *Dharmasūtras* of early mediaeval India, on the other. Nevertheless, the *Upaniṣadic* thought remained a part of old Brāhmaṇism.

What Franklin Edgerton[11] called the "extraordinary norm" in Indian tradition is of Śramaṇic or non-Brāhmaṇic origin. The great doctrines concerning *yoga, dhyāna, karma, ahiṃsā, mokṣa,* and *saṃsāra* seem to have been the legacy of *munīs* or *śramaṇas*, 'ascetic sages'. These great ideas were the distinguishing features of śramaṇa thought which was perfected in early Jainism and Buddhism. In the older *Upaniṣads* these ideas appear only as intruders in the framework of Brāhmaṇa thought. We venture to suggest that these ideas entered into the Brāhmaṇical thought-current through the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga, and also perhaps through early Buddhism and Jainism. There is nothing in the older Vedic texts corresponding to these ideas and the possibility of their inner or linear evolution within Vedic Brāhmaṇism is ruled out not only by Vedic opposition to them but also by the existence of non-Brāhmaṇical *munis* as early as the time of the Ṛgveda.[12] The fact that only a few passages in some early *Upaniṣads* appear to be critical of old Vedic ideas and sacrificial rituals is an additional proof of the non-Vedic or non-Brāhmaṇical origin of these great ideas. It is possible to suggest that Yoga, Sāṃkhya, early Jainism, early Buddhism, and the extraordinary ideas of the early *Upaniṣads* had a common śramaṇic origin.

The fact that in spite of their opposition to Vedic authority, their non-theistic and dualistic character, the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga systems were at a later stage counted among the "six systems" of the "orthodox" tradition should not surprise us. For their ideas had been admitted to the Brāhmaṇical fold by such venerable and ancient authorities as the *Upaniṣads*. The fact that Bādarāyaṇa in his *Brahmasūtras* and Saṃkara in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* noted the non-theistic and dualistic and therefore "heterodox" character of these systems was of no consequence against their wholesale appropriation by the *Mahābhārata*, especially by the Bhagavadgītā. Attempts were made in mediaeval times to interpret these systems on theistic lines of Vaiṣṇava theology. We see this attempt even in the Great Epic. The admission of

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[9] L. M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India* (Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1967), p. XVIII.

[10] L. M. Joshi "*The Genesis of Buddhism Re-stated*" in *World Buddhism: Vesak Annual, 2516 (1972) p. 72.*

[11] *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 62 (1942) pp. 151–156.

[12] See *Rgveda,* X. 136; G. C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins* of *Buddhism*, (Allahabad, 1957) pp. 251 ff; L. M. Joshi, *Brāhmaṇism, Buddhism and Hinduism,* pp. 47 ff.; *History of the Punjab,* Vol. I. edited by L. M. Joshi, (Punjabi University; Patiala, 1973) Chapter on "*Religion and Society in the Rgvedic Age*."

Sākyamuni, the greatest Śramaṇa who had disregarded the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇa teachers of the Vedic tradition, who criticised priestly ritualism, the system of fixed castes (*varṇas*) and their duties (*dharmas*) and ridiculed Vedic sacrifices, to the rank of an incarnation (*avatāra*) of God in the Purāṇas, is another similar example. The Buddha, in spite of being what he was and what he stood for, was counted as an exalted member of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon of the "orthodox" tradition in mediaeval India because such powerful and sacred authorities as the *Purāṇas* had declared him the ninth avatāra of Viṣṇu. These examples of assimilation of śramaṇic elements should not mislead us into believing that they were not of non-Vedic origin.

The partial agreement or rather vague similarity between the teaching of early Pali Suttas and those of the early Upaniṣads is thus explained by the plausible hypothesis of their common śramaṇic background. How shall we explain the outstanding and fundamental differences between them? The answer is obvious. Śramaṇism and Brāhmaṇism, the two religious philosophies of ancient India, were in the early stages diametrically opposed to each other. The *Upaniṣadic* teachers were influenced by non-Vedic ascetic teachers, munīs and śramaṇas, and they attempted to harmonise the two ideologies from the standpoint of their own Vedic tradition, criticising or re-interpreting several of their older concepts and practises. For example, they offered a symbolic interpretation of sacrifice, declared the path of rituals as insecure and emphasised inner awakening instead of hymns. But the *Upaniṣads* remained firmly within the Vedic tradition, guarded as they were by Vedic Brāhmaṇas. Early Buddhism, on the other hand, had no roots in the Vedas, traced its origin and antiquity to the ancient path (*purāṇaṃ maggaṃ*) of śramaṇas and munīs or enlightened sages of former ages.[13] It had been rediscovered by Sākyamuni, the Great Sage (*mahāśramaṇa*), and developed along the lines indicated by him.

When a modern student of the religious history of ancient India seeks to study these differences, it is not because he is opposed to the idea of the unity of religions. The unity among the religions of mankind, if and when achieved, will be one of the greatest blessings on this earth. Certainly, we cannot bring about this unity by mystifying or misinterpreting their differences in origins and doctrines. We can perhaps contribute towards achieving harmony among the votaries of different faiths by impartially and respectfully studying their doctrines, beliefs and practises. According to this method of historical study of the religious traditions of mankind, one has to be sensitive to both the common points among different traditions and the distinctive elements peculiar to each. In addition to this impartial awareness, one has to have what might be called historical awareness. The past history of a particular religious tradition cannot be deduced from its present vicissitudes; the development of a particular tradition should be studied historically, through its early, middle and modern phases; the ideas and beliefs that characterised its middle phase may be found to have been non-existent in its early phase. Contrariwise, beliefs and practises characteristic of its earliest phase may be wanting in its latest phase. At the same time the awareness of the co-existence of other religious traditions and of the possibility of mutual contacts and interactions among them should not be lost sight of. One should also be able to free oneself from the yoke of the monolithic theory of the existence of only Indo-Āryan culture in early India. We must never forget that alongside the Indo-Āryanism or Vedic Brāhmaṇism there existed in India non-Vedic, perhaps non-Āryan, cultures since pre-historic times.

Precisely speaking, we have to understand that early Brāhmaṇism differed substantially from early Buddhism, on the one hand, and from neo- Brāhmaṇism on the other, that in the second stage of their development the character of both early Buddhism and early Brāhmaṇism was seriously changed and modified due to historical reasons and they came close to each other. Let

[13] *Saṃyuttanikāya* Vol. II, (1959), Nālandā Devanāgari Edition pp. 90–91; P. T. S. Edition, Vol. II, pp. 106–107.

us briefly review here some of the main differences between early Buddhism and early Brāhmaṇism.

The first outstanding difference is that Brāhmaṇism was a theistic system of faith, (even frankly polytheistic in pre-*Upaniṣadic* days) while Buddhism was a non-theistic tradition. The second major difference was that Brāhmaṇism was a form of *ātmavāda* expounding the eternal existence of the self (*ātman*), whereas the early Pali Suttas expounded a kind of *anātmavāda* or the doctrine that there is nothing lasting which one could call one's own. The *Upaniṣads* glorified and magnified the idea of the self and often identified it with the power pervading the world (*Brahman*). Liberation (*mokṣa*) in this theory consisted in the realisation of this power within oneself and of its identity with the ground of the universe. Early Buddhist texts, on the other hand, taught the extinction of the idea of the self; a real and changeless self, they taught, was not to be found anywhere. In the Pali Suttas freedom from belief in a substantial and permanent self is regarded as essential for liberation (*vimutti*).

The *Upaniṣadic* quest centred upon the attainment of happiness (*ānanda*), in this present life and in an after-life. The attitude of Vedic teachers was world-affirming; they do not seem to have had an awareness of dukkha or dissatisfactoriness of phenomenal existence. It was in this awareness that early Buddhist monks found the basis of world-renunciation. The ideal of *Nirvāṇa* was pursued by those who were thoroughly disgusted with the world and who were convinced of the sufferings of saṃsāra. We shall look in vain in Vedic texts including the early Upaniṣads for anything corresponding to the doctrine of the three marks (*tilakkhaṇa*), viz. impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*), which according to Buddhist intuition characterise all phenomenal things (*dhamma*). The hallmark of Buddhist philosophy was the doctrine of conditioned genesis (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), according to which all the phenomenal things are causally inter-related and destined to fade away (*vyayadhammā*). This doctrine is foreign to Vedic or Brāhmaṇic thought.

The institutional character of an ascetic community (*Bhikkhusaṃgha*) among the followers of Sākyamuni and its regulation by a body of ascetic rules called *pātimokkha*, or *Vinaya* code, are unknown to Vedic texts. The idea of renunciation or going forth (*pabbajjā*) from home life was foreign to early Brāhmaṇic ideology. It was introduced in the *Dharmasūtras* as the fourth stage (*āśrama*) in a Brāhmaṇa's life only during post-Buddhist epoch. The *Upaniṣads* which refer to *āśramas* are commonly assigned to a date later than that of the Buddha and Mahāvīra. Even after the formulation of the scheme of four *āśramas* after the age of these śramaṇa teachers, the Brāhmaṇa law-givers continued to exalt the householder's stage (*grhastha*) as the best and foremost of all the stages.[14] Although the early *Upaniṣads* refer to *yoga* practises and include *dhyāna* in a theistic scheme, a system of meditation exercises is far from the ken of their philosophers. The contrast with Buddhism is striking and important. Bodhisattva Siddhārtha attained Nirvāṇa through awakening consequent on perfecting all the stages of meditation. The theory and practise of meditation were among the core elements of early Buddhistic culture.

The ideal of practising and perfecting the four "holy abidings" (*brahmavihāras*) or immeasurable social emotions, does not appear in the Brāhmaṇical tradition till the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali (cir. 300 CE) was written. It is likely that the practise of these virtues was of śramaṇic origin but they were emphasised especially in Buddhism.

Early Buddhism stood in striking contrast with Vedic Brāhmaṇism. It did not recognise the religious authority of the Vedas and rejected their sacrificial ritualism. By rejecting and refuting the religious authority of the Vedas, Buddhism rejected the very basis of Vedic Brāhmaṇism. It ridiculed the claims of priestly Brāhmaṇas regarding their ability to attain companionship with

[14] See *History of the Punjab,* Vol. I, appendix on *The Institution of Stages (Āṣramas)*; *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, III. I. 35 36; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* II. 6. 29–36.

gods through the study of the Vedas and performance of sacrificial rites. The greatest gods of the Vedic Āryans were considered by early Buddhists far inferior to the Buddha. Whereas in Vedic Brāhmaṇism kings, priests and the people alike worshipped gods like Indra and Prajāpati (Brāhmaṇaspati, Brahmā), in Buddhism these exalted gods figured as devotees and disciples of the Buddha who was the teacher not only of men but also of the gods (*satthā devamanussānaṃ*). In Brāhmaṇism the gods are powerful and immortal, in Buddhism they are declared to be subject to the law of kamma and therefore to death and rebirth. The Brāhmaṇical view of the creation of the universe by an omnipotent and supreme Person or Lord is clearly opposed to early Buddhism. In short, the whole theology of early Brāhmaṇism was irrelevant to the Buddhist quest of the ultimate release.

The ideas of Vedic Brāhmaṇas ran counter to those of early Buddhism. The seers (*rsīs*) and sages of the Vedic tradition lived a householder's life and sought health, wealth, longevity and offspring through sacrifices and singing hymns. The Buddhist ascetics (*munis, śramaṇas*), on the other hand, having renounced the household life with all its perils and pleasures, sought transcendental peace and spiritual liberation (*vimutti*) through meditation (*jhāna*) and inner awakening (*paññā*). Vedic ceremonialism (*karmakanda*) was matched by Buddhist meditation (*jhāna*) and ascesis (*yoga*). The Brāhmaṇical tradition of three knowledges (*veda-trayi*), i.e. the knowledge of the first three Vedas (*Rg, Yajur, Sāma*), was matched in the Buddhist tradition by three kinds of super-knowledge (*abhiññā*) called "threefold insight" (*tevijjā*), i.e. knowledge of former lives, clairvoyance, and the destruction of the four *āsavas,* (sensuality, the desire to be something, wrong views and spiritual blindness). Whereas in Vedic Brahmanism *brahmacārya* was understood to mean studentship or the study of the Vedas under a learned Brāhmaṇa, in Buddhism it came to be regarded as synonymous with holy conduct or religious life lived with a view to attaining freedom from saṃsāra. In Buddhism *brahmacariya* included a whole range of spiritual culture. The scriptures say: "*Brahmacariyaṃ dhammacariyaṃ*." Buddhist spiritual culture emphasises the simultaneous development of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), whereas the Brahmanical culture insisted on clearing a threefold debt to seers (*ṛṣīs*), gods (*devas*) and ancestors (*pitrs*) through the study of the Veda, performance of sacrifice and procreation of sons.

Whereas the slaughter of animals in religious rituals (*yajñā*), was a regular element of old Brāhmaṇism, practise of inoffensiveness (*ahiṃsā*) towards all living beings was kept at the head of the Buddhist list of moral precepts (*sikkhāpada*). The other virtues extolled in early Buddhist scriptures are compassion, friendliness, impartiality, truth, non-attachment, self-denial, selflessness, chastity, liberality, forbearance, humility, freedom from greed, anger and conceit, self-reliance, watchfulness, satisfaction, benevolence, meditation, wisdom and a mind turned towards Enlightenment.

The Buddha's teachings sought to liberate human beings not only from the self-system (*ātmavāda*), they also paved the way for social emancipation of men and women. The Brāhmaṇical theory of the four castes was criticised as ridiculous and the practise of untouchability and social inequality was condemned as unjust and irrational. The Buddhist tradition recognised the freedom of faith and offered equality of opportunity in matters of religious culture to men and women without regard to their caste, colour or social status. The Buddhist critique of the Brāhmaṇical doctrine of four castes and their fixed duties and privileges (dharmas) was one of the main issues to which the privileged Brāhmaṇas strongly reacted. This was the beginning of Brāhmaṇical hostility towards Buddhism which stopped only with the disappearance of Buddhist monks from Indian soil.

Buddhism emphasised a practical and empirical approach and generally supported a rational outlook towards life and its problems. It did not enforce any dogma or credo on its votaries.

Brāhmaṇism repeatedly insisted on the dogma of the authority of the Vedas and condemned every other idea and practise not sanctioned by the *sruti*. The *Kālāmasutta* presents a statement of the Buddhist attitude towards rational thought and emphasises conviction born of careful understanding. Transcending theistic and atheistic theories, the Buddha proclaimed the middle way (*majjhima paṭipadā*) in thought and practise. The highest goal in Buddhism is Nirvāṇa, the Dhamma which is impersonal and absolute. With the attainment of Nirvāṇa, saṃsāra or the world-process of change and suffering ceases. Buddhism is chiefly concerned with the liberation of beings from this world-process. Just as the water of the great ocean has but one taste—that of salt—likewise the doctrine and the practise of Buddhism has but one taste, the taste of liberation (*vimuttirasa*).

A remarkable feature of Buddhism is its universality. The scope of the Buddhist teaching is co-extensive with the whole of humanity. It is not a religion of a particular race or chosen people. Its holy books and its noble practises are open to people of all lands. Buddhism aimed at the enlightenment of all beings. Its teachings are universal and not relative to a particular geographical area or country. Although it originated in India, it soon made the world its home. The Buddha had directed his pupils to disseminate the doctrine of pure conduct and higher life in all directions.

This universality or cosmopolitanism was not shared by Vedic and *Upaniṣadic* doctrines. The Vedic brāhmaṇas zealously guarded their scriptures and the techniques of sacrificial rituals were the special crafts of priests. The *Upaniṣads* continued this tradition of secrecy and class consciousness. The very word *upaniṣad* means something to be learned by sitting close to the teacher, a mystery or a secret and confidential doctrine The *Upaniṣads* do not insist on caste, it may be observed, but to expound a doctrine for the good and enlightenment of all humans was beyond the purview of their authors. It was in Buddhism, for the first time in history, that the doors of spiritual perfection were opened wide for all those who sought it. Men and women of all castes and of no castes were given the full freedom to live a pure life in quest of good rebirth and ultimate release. In this tradition there is no eternal hell or purgatory nor an eternal paradise. Everyone has the freedom to work out one's destiny. Even the most evil and vicious person could attain not only heaven but also liberation, and the greatest of gods was subject to the law of kamma and conditioned genesis. The supreme goal had been announced for one and all, the doctrine (*dhamma*) and the method (*vinaya*) had been expounded by the torch-bearer of humanity out of supreme compassion for the living beings. This ideal of great compassion, wholly absent in the Vedas, came to be the mark of the Buddhist way.

IV. The Buddhist Contribution to Indian Civilization

Art and Architecture

Even if we judge him only by his posthumous effects on the civilization of India, Sākyamuni Buddha was certainly the greatest man to have been born in India, and the contribution of his teachings towards Indian history and culture was perhaps greater than that of Brāhmaṇism. Before becoming a major faith and a civilising force in the world, Buddhism had been a mighty stream of thought and a tremendous fountain-head of human culture in its homeland. Ignorance or neglect of the available Buddhist literature is not the only shortcoming of the "traditional" approach. The fact that the knowledge of Indian archaeology is confined to a handful of scholars is another factor which has prevented most of us from viewing Buddhism in its entirety. Mortimer Wheeler observes that "Archaeologically at least we cannot treat

Buddhism merely as a heresy against a prevailing and fundamental Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy."[15] For, in spite of the ravages of time and destruction by Indian and foreign fanatics, Buddhism is still speaking vividly and majestically through its thousands of inscriptions, about one thousand rock-cut sanctuaries and monasteries, thousands of ruined *stūpas* and monastic establishments and an incalculable number of icons, sculptures, paintings and emblems, that it prevailed universally among the classes and masses of India for over fifteen centuries after the age of the Buddha, and that its ideas of compassion, peace, love, benevolence, rationalism, spiritualism and renunciation had formed the core of the superstructure of ancient Indian thought and culture. What is proved by Buddhist archaeology is affirmed by Buddhist philosophy and literature also. Not only the numerical strength and volume of Buddhist texts extant in Pali, Buddhist Sanskrit, classical Sanskrit, Prākrit and Apabhraṃśa, or preserved in South and South-East Asian, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and Central Asian languages and scripts, but also the variety, modernity, depth and subtlety of Buddhist literature and philosophy lead us to conclude that the religion and philosophy of Buddhist texts had captivated the Indic world. According to Swāmi Vivekānanda, Buddhism had at one time "nearly swallowed up two-thirds of the population" of India.

Buddhism in the Theravāda tradition has been a twofold movement: the Buddhism of monks and nuns or ascetic Buddhism, and the Buddhism of the laymen and laywomen (*upāsaka, upāsikā*) or popular and social Buddhism. Along with the way to Nirvāṇa, there was the way to 'good rebirth'. In the *Brahmajālasutta*, the *Pātimokkha*, and the *Visuddhimagga*, all worldly arts and crafts are described as unworthy of those who seek ultimate liberation. Prohibition of participation by monks and nuns in dances, songs, instrumental music, shows of entertainment and use of articles of personal beautification is the burden of the 7th and 8th *sikkhāpadas*. The case was different in popular Buddhism or *upāsaka-dhamma*. The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* narrates how the nobles and the commoners, both men as well as women, of the Malla clan, honoured the body of the Tathāgata by dancing and singing in accompaniment with instrumental music, with garlands and perfumes. Similar artistic activities full of ceremonial dignity and aesthetic sense are reported in the *Lalitavistara* and the *Buddhacarita* to have been performed by men and women of Kapilavastu at the birth of the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha.

The growth of Buddhist fine arts was due largely to the educational, religious, and devotional needs of the Buddhists. The supremely perfect and supernal personality of the Buddha (*sarvaṅga sundaraṃ* or *sarvākāravaropeta*) was the greatest attraction for artists and poets and the supreme object of devout contemplation for monks and mystics; hence the growth of Buddhology, Buddhist iconology, sculpture and painting. With the emergence of Mahāyāna, the Buddha image became the central plank of popular Buddhism and it was manufactured in a thousand plastic forms. Manufacturing religious icons and emblems was viewed as a pious deed. So was excavating vihāras in live rocks and erecting shrines and stūpas. The Pali *Apadānas* as well as the Sanskrit *Avadānas* eminently display the popular enthusiasm for adoration (*pūja*) of emblems such as the wheel, bowl, foot-print, the bodhi-tree and other items connected with the Master's earthly existence. From about the beginning of the Christian era images of the Buddha began to come into existence and revolutionised rituals of worship not only in Buddhism but also in Brāhmaṇism. In place of sacrificial rituals, temple rituals now became popular. The style of the Buddhist stūpa seems to have inspired the style of Brāhmaṇical temples, especially those with a *sikhara*. It may be suggested that the early Buddhist practise of raising stūpas or sacred reliquary mounds perhaps reflected, *inter alia*, a sense of time and historicity. The Vedic Āryans lacked this sense and hence in Brāhmaṇism the tradition of building stūpas did not develop. The Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas considered the practise of venerating stūpas or *caityas* (called *eḍukas*) as a mark of the dark age (*kaliyuga*). However, later

[15] *Antiquity*, Vol. XXII, No. 89, March 1949, p. 5.

on the practise was adopted by those sects of the Brāhmaṇical tradition which were most influenced by later Buddhism, viz. Śaivaite, Vedānta and Gorakhpanth.

Of all the joys, that of Dhamma, *dhammapīti*, was supreme. The Buddha had said that "the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts." This was the teaching of Emperor Aśoka too.[16] The gifts of Dhamma included all that was conducive to nobler and higher life including the knowledge of doctrines, articles of faith and devotion, scriptures, icons, symbols and all the other means of growing in piety or expressing compassion and liberality. In this way, Buddhism became the source of manifold artistic and literary activities reflecting the creative and aesthetic genius of its teachers and followers.

With the passage of time old inhibitions receded into the background; moreover, the theory of perfection in expedient means (*upāyakauṣalya pāramitā*) naturally required and encouraged proficiency in various arts and sciences. The Bodhisattva ideal of Mahāyāna left no difference between *bhikṣus* and *upāsakas*. The art and literature of Buddhism was produced through the donations not only of *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* but also of monks and nuns. For instance there are 827 Brāhmī inscriptions on the monuments of Sāñchī alone. Among the donors are mentioned the names of over two hundred monks and nuns; the rest are lay followers.[17] Similar is the case at a number of other centres of Buddhist art and culture. Hsuan Tsang has noted the names of a number of monks who established monasteries, built shrines and erected images. In this connection mention may be made of Jayasena of Yaṣtivana-Vihāra, an *upāsaka* but a great teacher and author of Buddhist ṣāstras.[18] The Nālandā stone inscription of Mālāda describes the monks of the University of Nālandā as "reputed experts in true scriptures and the arts."[19]

The community of monks became in the course of time a community of teachers of society, and they have left a permanent influence on the country people who esteem any tawny-clad person not only for his austere dress but also for his supposed proficiency in solving secular problems, such as knowledge of medicine for example. King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi of Sri Lanka is reported to have said that "the very sight of monks is auspicious and conducive to our protection."[20] The "sharers" of alms (Bhikkhus), before whom kings and nobles bowed, had been the cultural leaders and religious teachers of society and a source of inspiration for the masses for several centuries before the sacking of Nālandā Mahāvihāra by Bukhtyar Khilji.

The great mass of Buddhist art and literature, so rich, varied and deeply inspiring in both form and content, was inspired by the beauty and the norms of the Dhamma. This Dhamma itself was conceived of as a blessing in the beginning, a blessing in the middle and a blessing in the end. It is to be noted that the Buddhist seers make a distinction between the pursuit of abstract beauty which they found through the spotless spiritual eye of the Dhamma, and the delights of its ephemeral beauty. All, that is holy and utterly well and is conducive to the attainment of the supreme goal, is indeed beautiful. This is the spiritual dimension of aesthetics.

We need hardly mention that the earliest and the best painting of ancient India is the Buddhist painting; that the best sculpture of the golden days of ancient Indian culture is the Buddhist sculpture; that the earliest historical sculpture of India is also the Buddhist sculpture. In the field of architecture too, Buddhism was the pioneer source of inspiration. In both structural and rock-cut architecture of ancient India, Buddhist examples had provided a permanent legacy in planning, technique and style. The earliest historical buildings in brick are

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[16] *Dhammapada*, verse 354; Aṣoka Rock Edict XI.

[17] John Marshall (ed.) *The Monuments of Sāñchī,* Vol. I, (Delhi 1940). pp. 264 ff.

[18] Thomas Watters*, On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. II (Delhi, 1961) p. 146.

[19] *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 66 (Calcutta, 1942) p. 79 *sadāgama-kalā-vikhyāta-vidvad-janāḥ.*

[20] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XXV. 3 (ed. N. K. Bhagavat, Bombay, 1959) p.169.

the ruins of Buddhist monasteries; the earliest man-made rock-cut halls are the vihāras of Buddhists and Ājīvaka monks excavated under the orders of a Buddhist emperor. Last but not least the earliest and the best free standing monolithic pillars with beautiful capitals of animal figures were inspired by Buddhism and conceived by a Buddhist genius. All subsequent examples of *kīrtistaṃbhas* and *dhva jastaṃbhas* have been influenced by Aśokan. *latās*. Indian palaeography and epigraphy owe a great deal to the original and pioneer inspiration of Buddhism and its lithic records. The earliest historical inscriptions of India are the Buddhist inscriptions. The *dhammalipi* of Aśoka became the mother of all subsequent varieties of Brāhmī and its derivative Indian scripts.

Polity

Buddhism has contributed significantly to the development of the forms and institution of civil government, including the ideals of kingship, in ancient India. Sākyamuni was a teacher also of the principles of righteous government, individual freedom and the rule of law. The seven conditions of stability of a republican body which he suggested to the Magadhan diplomat, Vassakāra, are words of social wisdom still relevant to our contemporary political life.

The influence of Buddhism on ancient Indian political theory and administrative organisation could be understood in the light of (i) Buddhist speculations concerning the origin of state and government, (ii) the Buddhist organisation of the Bhikkhu-Saṃgha and its impact on democratic states of ancient India, (iii) the influence of the Buddha's teachings on kings, queens, and their vassals and ministers and (iv) certain concepts and institutions, concerning political life, which were inspired by Buddhist teaching. With regard to the first point, the Buddhist theory of the origin of state and government as related in the *Aggaññasutta*[21] is of democratic import. A similar version in the *Sāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* seems to have been modelled after the Buddhist theory. The fact that many ancient Indian kings and authors of political thought, felt that the king owes his authority to his subjects may have been suggested by the legend concerning Mahājanasammata, the first traditional king. The *Arthaṣāstra* of Kauṭilya, the Junāgrh Rock Inscription of Rudradāman I, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Mañjusrīmūlakalpa* and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* suggest that the tradition of the election of kings was continued till the 12th century CE in some parts of India.[22]

With respect to the second point it is a well-known fact that the organisation and administration of the Buddhist Saṃgha was based on democratic ideas and that the democratic traditions of early Buddhist republics[23] were continued till as late as the time of Samudragupta (4th century CE), who seems to have wiped out the republican states in his time. But the tradition survived in *paura-janapada* assemblies and also in village-administration, and has come down to our own era in the form of *grāmo-pañcāyatas*.

With regard to the third point, namely the influence of the Buddha's teachings on ancient Indian kings, queens and their ministers, there is a mass of evidence in the form of literary, epigraphic and foreign records and a modest volume could be written on this subject alone. It is impossible here even to mention the mere names of all the kings, queens, nobles, and ministers of ancient India, who were Buddhists or were influenced by Buddhism. Among the kings who were Buddhist by faith, we may include Bimbisāra, Ajātatṣatru, Puṣakarasārin (of Gāndhāra), Kālāṣoka, Emperor Aśoka, Daṣaratha Maurya, Brhadratha Maurya, Menander, the Greek king, Kaniṣka I, the Kuṣāna king, one of the Sātavāhanas, either Sīmuka or his son Krṣṇa,

[21] *Dīghanikāya,* Vol. II (Nālanda Ed. 1959) pp. 58–60.

[22] See L. M. Joshi in *Maha Bodhi Journal,* Vol. 73 Calcutta, May, 1965) pp. 115–116.

[23] Cf. Gokuldās De, *Democracy in Early Buddhist Saṃgha,* Calcutta, 1954;
R. C. Majumdār, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, (Calcutta, 1922), Chapter IV.

Buddhagupta, Tathāgatagupta, Narasiṃhagupta, Bālāditya of the Gupta dynasty, Pūrṇavarman of Magadha, Rājabhaṭa of Bengal, Rājyavardhana and Harṣavardhana of Thāneśvara, Dhruvasena or Dhruvabhaṭa of Mālavā, Sīlāditya I, Dharmāditya of Mālavā, Meghavāhana of Kashmir, Subhakaradeva of Orissa, almost all the rulers of the Candra dynasty, Khaḍga dynasty, Bhadra dynasty and the Bhaumakāra dynasty of Bengal and Orissa, Gopāla and Dharmapāla and some other kings of the Pāla dynasty. This list is by no means comprehensive. Many of these kings were *paramopāsaka* or *parāmāsaugata*, i.e. devout Buddhists. With the ignoble exception of about ten kings, who persecuted Buddhism in their kingdoms, as a rule most of the kings of ancient India had sympathy and respect for Buddhism and patronised the monks and their establishments. The same is true of most of the queens and ministers whose patronage of Buddhism is known either through literature or through inscriptions or through foreign records.

It appears that India owes to Aśoka *the idea of a welfare state* as well as *the idea of a secular state*, secular in the sense not of a state without any religion but in the sense that political administration of a state should be free, as far as possible, from sectarian principles and must respect the truly religious sentiments of different votaries that dwell in a particular state. Both these ideas are suggested by the inscriptions of Aśoka. Aśokan ideals of kingship were directly responsible for the growth of the idea of a welfare state free from the exclusive influence of a particular church. The idea of *dharmavijaya* or conquest by righteousness practised and propagated by Aśoka was inspired by Buddhist morality. This grand concept remained an ideal for many kings who came after Aśoka. It does not seem to have been merely an imperial boast of Aśoka when he declared that he had gained a righteous victory by silencing the war-drums (*bheri-ghoṣā*) and by beating the drums of righteousness (*dharma-ghoṣā*) throughout his empire and along its frontiers.

The author of the Chinese *Hou Hanshu* also noted that the people of India "practise the religion of the Buddha; it has become a habit with them not to kill and not to fight."[24] Along with this concept of conquest through righteousness, Buddhism gave us the concept of an inoffensive sacrifice by kings, a *yajña* entirely free from *hiṃsā*[25] and full of charity and kindness. This concept was practised by Emperor Aśoka and King Mehavāhana of Kashmir.[26] In the Ñāṇāghāṭa cave inscription of Nāganikā we hear of this non-violent sacrifice called *anārabhaniyo yaño*.[27]

Lastly we may mention that ancient Indian political theory owes to Buddhism such institutions as that of *dharmamahāmātra, dharmasamāja, dharmadūta*, such royal epithets as *Sīlāditya, Vinayāditya, Dharmāditya, Paramasaugata, Paramopāsaka* etc. and to Buddhist social thought such historical examples as kingship of Brāhmaṇas, sūdras or of vaisyas. In early Brāhmaṇical texts only a Kṣatriya could be a ruler. In about the 2nd century BCE this rule was changed and it was declared that even a Brāhmaṇa could be a ruler. This change in the duties of a Brāhmaṇa was possibly suggested by the concrete example of Puṣyamitra Suṅga, the Brāhmaṇa general of the last Maurya king who, having murdered his sovereign, made himself king of the decaying Maurya empire. Among the Brāhmaṇa families which ruled over small areas in different periods of ancient Indian history mention may be made of the Suṅgas, Kāṇvas, Kadaṃbas, Vākāṭakas, and Sātavāhanas.

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[24] Quoted after Sten Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* Vol. II, p. LXVII.

[25] "*Dīghanikāya,*" Vol. I, *Kùṭadantasutta.*

[26] See L. M. Joshi in *Journal of Oriental Institute,* Vol. XIV (Baroda, 1964) pp. 156–157.

[27] D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 1942) p. 187.

Education

When the Buddha had founded at Varaṇāsi the ideal *saṃgha* consisting of sixty worthies (*arahats*) he commanded them in the following words: "Walk, monks, on your tour for the blessing of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and men. Monks, teach Dhamma which is a blessing in the beginning, a blessing in the middle, a blessing in the end." We quote this passage from the Mahāvagga to recall that Buddhism was, from the very beginning, a missionary movement founded on compassion, determined spiritually to transform the world of humanity and to awaken it morally, intellectually and spiritually. Who can say how many millions of human beings had been awakened morally, intellectually and spiritually by the message of Buddhism in the course of its long history? We can only imagine that an immeasurable multitude of creatures must have been awakened in India alone. Buddhist monastic colleges and universities of ancient India threw open their doors to all those who wished to know, irrespective of caste, colour, creed or country.

This universal attitude and catholic spirit of Buddhist culture and its educational centres earned a great international reputation for India and attracted students and scholars from far-off countries. The same cannot be said of the Brāhmaṇical system of education and its institutions. It is therefore quite proper to attribute to the influence of Buddhism the rise of organised public educational institutions in ancient India. The influence of Buddhist monastic and educational institutions on the growth and propagation of Indian culture can scarcely be overestimated. It was through Buddhism that Indian art, literature, thought and morals were transmitted throughout the length and breadth of Asia during the first millennium of the Christian era. In India it was after the Buddhist model of an organised institution of monks that Saṃkarā-Cārya established *advaita* seats (*pīṭas*) with an ordained and regulated community of Śaiva-Vedāntika monks. There is no evidence of Brāhmaṇical monasteries before the time of Saṃkara (cir. 900 CE). Charles Eliot is right when he observes that "the monastic institutions of India seem due to Buddhism." "Saṃkara perceived the advantage of the cenobitic life for organising religion and founded a number of *maths* or colleges. Subsequent religious leaders imitated him."[28] One of the centres founded by Saṃkara was located in Puri or Jagannāthpurī in Orissa. According to Swāmi Vivekānanda, a leading modern teacher of Saṃkara's school, "the temple of Jagannath is an old Buddhistic temple. We took this and others over and re-Hinduised them. We shall have to do many things like that yet."[29]

Language & Literature

Buddhist contribution to Indian languages and literature was matched only by the richness and variety of the Buddhist religion and philosophy. The development of Pali and its literature was wholly due to Buddhism. Of its great historical, cultural and literary value, scholars are well aware. But Pali was not the only area which contributed to the flowering of the Buddhist tradition. The vast amount of Pali texts, canonical and non-canonical, is the contribution of only one major branch, doubtless one of the most ancient and orthodox branches of Buddhism. Several other schools of Buddhism cultivated varieties of Buddhist Sanskrit and varieties of Buddhist Prākrit. The Buddhist intellectuals of ancient India contributed not only to what is now called Buddhist Sanskrit and its varieties but also to what is called Pāṇinian or Classical Sanskrit. Thus while we have the *Avadānas* and *Mahāyanasūtra* in a Sanskrit peculiar to the Buddhist tradition, we also have such texts as the *Madhyamakaṣāstra*, the *Jātakamālā* and the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, to mention only three out of numerous texts, in classical Sanskrit. The Sanskrit

[28] *Hinduism and Buddhism,* Vol. II (London, 1921) p. 175.
[29] *Complete Works,* Vol. III, p. 264.

of the Buddhist *tantras* and *sādhanas* presents yet another category of language. Then the language of the epigraphs of Aśoka is a kind of Prākrit, by no means uniform in all versions of the major rock edicts, quite different from the language of what has been called the *Gāndhāri Dharmapada*. The Buddha's injunction to his disciples to learn the sacred word in their own languages (*sakāya-niruttiyā*) was fully carried out by the faithful Buddhists.

The Pali authors were the first to write hagiographies and traditional historical narratives. Some sections of the *Mahāvagga* and the *Cullavagga* contain the earliest examples of what may be called Buddhist historical literature. The *Buddhavaṃsa* presents us with the oldest hagiographies of the Buddhist tradition. Parallel developments of legendary biographies and hagiographies of mythical heroes and sages can be seen in the *Mahābhārata* and the Jaina *Kalpasūtra*. The Jātakas and the *Apadānas* (Sanskrit: *Avadānas*) remained a constant source of inspiration to future poets and religious authors who wrote in Sanskrit. Kṣemendra (10th century), for example, was first a Śaiva and later on he became a Bhāgavata; he was inspired by Buddhist subjects and legends. He wrote the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* in beautiful verse wherein he collected one hundred and eight *avadānas*. Whether it is in the *Vetālapañcaviṃsatikā* or the *Dasakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin (7th century) or the *Kathāsaritasāgara* of Somadeva (11th century), the Buddhist fables and stories, in spite of changes due to transmission in different versions, retained their psychological appeal, to the learned as well as to the simple folk. The didactic material of the Purāṇas and the *Dharmaṣāstras* contains much that can ultimately be traced to Buddhist moral teachings. This is especially true of the *Mahābhārata*. The beginnings of epic poetry, particularly of dramatic poetry, can possibly be traced to Buddhist *ākhyāna* poetry. The numerous dramatic narrations in the form of dialogues in Pali verse or in verse mixed with prose present us with the earliest forms of Buddhist *ākhyānas* or so-called "ballads."

The contribution of Buddhism to the psychological literature of ancient India has perhaps never been equalled in the literature of Brāhmaṇical yoga. The psychological advances made by the Abhidhamma schools of Buddhist thought deserve detailed study in the light of contemporary psychology developed in the west. The problems of Abhidhamma psychology have hardly been studied yet in relation to the psychology of Tāntrika yoga and the Siddha culture. A study of devotional meditation (*bhakti-yoga*), of its techniques and terminology as revealed in the Hindi literature of mediaeval saint-poets, is likely to throw important light on the transmission and transformation of the classical Buddhist system of *dhyāna*.

It is well known that the first dramatist in the history of Sanskrit literature was a Buddhist poet, Aśvaghoṣa (first century CE). Fragments of three dramas in Sanskrit, including the fragments of the *Sāriputraprakaraṇa*, a drama by Aśvaghoṣa, have come to light from Central Asian Buddhist ruins. Aśvaghoṣa was the forerunner of classical Sanskrit dramatists like Bhāsa and Kālidāsa. Winternitz states that "the finished form of the epics together with the perfect technique of the dramas of Aśvaghoṣa proves that they were composed only on some long-standing models. By itself it appears improbable that a thoroughly Buddhist poet should be the first to have composed in this style."[30] This is rather strange to read and no reason is given for assuming that it is improbable for "a thoroughly Buddhist poet" to be the pioneer in ornate style of *kāvya* and the perfect technique of dramaturgy. On the other hand, there are no models extant which can be said to have influenced Aśvaghoṣa in the techniques of the Sanskrit drama. At another place the same scholar is obliged to say that "Aśvaghoṣa, however, is the first Indian poet, who is actually known to us as an author of dramas."[31] Although Vālmīki is traditionally considered the 'first poet' in Sanskrit, the extant *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to his authorship is of composite character and uncertain date. No such uncertainty attaches to Āryasūra (4th century

[30] M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* Vol. III, Part I, Eng. Tr. by Subhadra Jha (Delhi, 1063) p. 39.

[31] Ibid., p. 198.

CE) and his authorship of the *Jātakamālā* and other works. He has been described as "the forerunner of the poets of classical, chaste and ornate Sanskrit." In Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* we find "the loftiest flights of religious poetry." Buston's statement that there were one hundred commentaries on this text, out of which only eight were translated into Tibetan,[32] gives an idea of the extent to which the Buddhist ideals were capable of inspiring men of letters.

Buddhist poets were pioneers also in the composition of hymns of praise (*stotra, stava, stuti*) in Sanskrit. The *Prajñāpāramitāstuti* may or may not be the work of Nāgārjuna (circa 100 CE), but he certainly composed the *Catuḥstava*. The earliest specimen of a hymn is possibly the *Buddhānusmriti* section of the *Mahāvastu*, a canonical text of the *Mahāsāṃghika* school. The greatest writer of Buddhist hymns was however Mātrceta (circa 100 CE). The following works ascribed to him, are preserved in the Tibetan bsTan-hGyur: *Varṇārhavarṇa-stotra* (also called *Catuḥśataka*), *Triratnamaṅgala-stotra, Samyaksambuddhalaksaṇa-stotra, Ekottarika-stotra, Sugata-pañcatriṃsa-stotra, Triratna-stotra, Satapañcāsatkanāma-stotra, Āryatārādevi-stotra, Sarvārthasiddhi-nāma-stotra-rāja, Mātrceta-gīti* and *Āryatārā-stotra*. Aśvaghoṣa, perhaps a contemporary of Mātrceta, composed the *Gaṇḍi-stotra-gātha*. *Misraka-stava* of Dīgnāga, *Suprabhāta-stotra* of King Harṣa and *Sragdharā-stotra* of Sarvajñamitra. All these texts are of immense value from the standpoint of religious poetry. The *Bhakti-śataka* of Rāmacandra Bhāratī was perhaps the last hymn in praise of the Buddha composed in Sanskrit by an Indian Buddhist poet.

One of the latest contributions made by the Buddhists to the literature of India was in the form of *dohās* or *gītīs* (songs) composed by Buddhist *siddhas* (adepts in Tāntrika culture) in Apabhraṃṣa. This language seems to have been the mother of several modern Indian languages including Hindi, Oriya and Bengali. The terms and concepts of Buddhism were transmitted by the siddhas through the medium of their Apabhraṃṣa poems to mediaeval lore of saint-poets. Unfortunately only a small portion of the siddha literature has survived to this day.

Finally mention may be made in passing of the contributions of Buddhist writers to Sanskrit grammar and lexicography. A Buddhist scholar named Sarvavarman wrote the *Kātantra*, in which he tried to build a new system of Sanskrit grammar. He possibly lived in or about the second century CE. In the eighth century a commentary was written on *Kātantra* by one Durgasiṃha. The Buddhist scholar, Candragomin, (circa 500 CE) wrote the *Cāndravyākaraṇa* with an auto-commentary (*vṛtti*) on it. It became the standard grammatical treatise in most Buddhist countries of Asia. Bruno Liebich's researches have shown that an extensive literature developed around the *Cāndravyākaraṇa*. Another early grammarian was Indragomin, possibly a Buddhist scholar, who wrote the *Aindravyākaraṇa*. The text was once famous in Buddhist Nepal, but it has not come down to us. The Buddhist logician Jinendrabodhi wrote the *Kāsikā-Vivaraṇapañjikā* also known as *Nyāsa*, a commentary on the *Kāsikā* of Jayāditya and Vāmana. Not less than three Buddhist grammarians of Sanskrit seem to have flourished in the eleventh century. Saraṇadeva wrote a work called *Durghaṭa-vṛtti* in which he simplified the difficult points in the *Aṣṭādhyāyi* of Pānini. It is said that the text of the *Durghaṭa-vṛtti* was revised by his teacher Sarvarakṣita. Maitreyarakṣita wrote the *Tantrapradīpa*, a critical commentary on the *Nyāsa*. This author also wrote another grammatical work called the *Dhātupradīpa*.

Fragments of a manuscript in eight leaves of a synonymical dictionary in Sanskrit were purchased by F. Weber at Leh in Ladakh. The author of this dictionary is believed to have been a Buddhist scholar and these fragments are supposed to be the oldest fragments of any dictionary in Sanskrit known so far. Another Sanskrit dictionary which seems to have originated in Buddhist literary circles was the *Utpalinī* compiled by Vyāḍi. The existence of this dictionary is known from quotations from it in some later commentaries. Vyāḍi may or may not have been a Buddhist by faith but he seems to have drawn largely on Buddhist literary sources. The most

[32] E. Obermiller, *Bus-Ton's History of Buddhism*, Part II, (Heidelberg, 1931) p. 166.

famous and earliest extant dictionary is the *Nāmalingānusāsana*, better known as *Amarākośa* by Amarasiṃha who possibly flourished in the 6th century CE. He was a Buddhist though he did not pay any special attention to Buddhist vocabulary in his dictionary. It is said that there are as many as 50 known commentaries on the *Amarākoṣa*.

Mention may be made in this connection of three important Buddhist Sanskrit texts which are well known lexicographical collections of technical Buddhist terms. The first is the *Dharmasaṃgraha* attributed to Nāgārjuna (?); it contains valuable lists of technical terms and important names collected under one hundred and forty headings. The other text is the *Arthaviniscaya-sūtra* which resembles the *Dharmasaṃgraha* to a great extent but contains also explanations of technical terms of Buddhist religion and philosophy. The third is the famous *Mahāvyutpatti*, a bilingual (Sanskrit-Tibetan) encyclopaedic lexicon of Buddhist proper names and technical terms. It was prepared jointly by Indian and Tibetan scholars in Tibet early in the 9th century.

The last Buddhist dictionary writer to be mentioned was Puruṣottamadeva (circa 12th century). As a supplement to the *Amarakoṣa* he wrote the *Trikāṇḍasesa*. The *Amarakoṣa* is divided into three parts hence its secondary title "*Trikāṇḍi*." Puruṣottamadeva follows this arrangement in his work which "contains rare names of the Buddha and many words that are peculiar to Buddhist Sanskrit."[33] Another dictionary by this author is called the *Hārāvalī*.

Before leaving this section we want to mention an interesting work by a great Buddhist poet and abbot of the Jagaddala-Vihāra (District Malda). This is an anthology of *subhasitas* selected from the works of 227 authors and containing in all 1739 verses and called the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*. Its author was Vidyākara who made the anthology in the eleventh century. Among other things this remarkable work proves that Dharmakīrti, the Buddhist logician (7th century), was also a great poet. The anthology reveals the existence of a large number of Buddhist poets whose works are now lost for ever.[34]

Social Life

Many modern scholars maintain that Buddhism is a monastic religion, an ascetic movement, and not a social movement. I have criticised this view elsewhere[35] and pointed out that monasticism is only one aspect of Buddhist religious tradition and we should not mistake one part for the whole. I also hold the view that word *saṃgha* does not mean merely 'the order of monks'. The community of monks is only a part of the saṃgha, not the whole of it. Saṃgha has to be understood to mean the entire community of those human beings who take refuge (*saraṇa*) in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṃgha. Saṃgha is the all embracing universal society of humans wedded to the doctrine and method taught by the Sage of the Sākyas. This universal saṃgha includes men as well as women, ascetics as well as householders. In Buddhist words, *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣunis*, *upāsakas*, and *updsikris*, all these are members of the saṃgha. Saṃgha is the third member of the holy triad of the Buddhist tradition. In this spiritual sense saṃgha includes all kinds of enlightened beings, viz. the perfectly Awakened Ones, (*samyaksambuddhas*), the individually Awakened Ones (*pratyekabuddhas*), the Worthy Ones (*arahats*), the Bodhisattvas as well as those holy beings who are in different stages of purification (*visuddhi*). This spiritual and

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[33] M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* Vol. III, Part II, Eng. Tr. by Subhadra Jha (Delhi, 1967) p. 457.

[34] Cf. *The Subhāsita-ratna-koṣa* of Vidyākara, ed. by D. D. Kosambi and V. V. Gokhale, H. O. S. Vol. 42 (Cambridge, Mass. 157); translated under the title *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* by Daniel H. H. Ingalls, H. O. S. vol. 44, (Cambridge, Mass: 1965).

[35] L. M. Joshi, "*Social Perspective of Buddhist Soteriology*" in *Religion and Society,* Vol. VIII, No. 3 (Bangalore, 1971) pp. 59–68.

ideal saṃgha is the true refuge sought by the faithful disciples of the Buddha. There is however no denying the fact that in practical life the Buddhists do make distinctions between ascetic members and lay members of the saṃgha; for instance, they use the word *bhikṣu-saṃgha* in contradistinction to *upāsaka-saṃgha*, and *bhikṣuni-saṃgha* to distinguish it from *bhikṣu-saṃgha*. In some old texts we find the *bodhisattvagaṇa* contrasted with the *śrāvaka-saṃgha*. Likewise in the contemporary situation we refer to the saṃghas or communities of different places and countries, for example the saṃgha of Sri Lanka, the saṃgha of Bangladesh or the Nepalese saṃgha and so on. Sometimes in one and the same country are found saṃghas based on geographical separation, sectarian affiliation etc. But these narrow and restricted meanings of the word saṃgha should not be allowed to obscure our vision of the *ariya-saṃgha*, the society of the enlightened beings, which is our ideal; nor should we lose sight of the universal society of human beings who are all united through their common dislike of suffering and common quest of happiness.

To say that Buddhism is a monkish or monastic religion is not true. Even in the Theravāda tradition this has never been wholly true. The Theravāda tradition did not envisage such an inseparable connection between the path of purity and the path of social life, as for example, was the case in the Brāhmaṇical tradition through the scheme of *Varṇāśrama-dharma*. In the Theravāda Buddhist view the joys of a homeless life of those who take the ochre robe are declared to be superior to the joys of married and household life. It would however be erroneous to suppose that Buddhism neglected the social life altogether.

There are many discourses preserved in the Pali suttas which contain principles and practises to be observed by those who live in society. A division of the *Majjhima Nikāya* is called *gahapativagga*. The *Maṅgalasutta* that we recite daily is nothing short of a summary of sociologically oriented soteriology. It may be recalled here that a comprehensive picture of the social perspective of Theravāda Buddhism may be gleaned from the *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, the *Sigālovādasutta*, the *Kandarakasutta*, the *Aṭṭhakanāgarasutta*, the *UPalisutta*, the *Ghaṭīkārasutta* and the *Mahākammavibhaṅgasutta*. Another authentic picture of the social ethics of early Buddhism is documented in the rock edicts of Emperor Aśoka.

It is true that the Pali texts make a clear distinction between ascetic and lay members of the saṃgha. This is as it should be in so far as their ends and means are concerned. Spiritual ends and means differ from social ends and means. Those who aspire to ultimate Freedom (*vimutti*) from saṃsāra are certainly superior to and different from those who aspire to rebirth in happy or heavenly abodes. The career of ascetics (*śramaṇas*) is therefore subtle, difficult and extraordinary. The vast majority of lay members follow a less subtle, less difficult and ordinary way of life. But this way of life is guided by the teachings of the Buddha and of Buddhist sages. The relationship that has existed between the ascetic and social members of the saṃgha through the ages clearly establishes the fact that those who interpret Theravāda Buddhism as ascetic and anti-social are mistaken.

The monks were never supposed to remain indifferent to human beings and their sufferings: the dhamma-vinaya was not meant only for those who had gone forth from home-life. Sākyamuni was a perfectly Awakened One and therefore a world teacher. He was not a teacher of monks only; he was the teacher not only of all human beings, monks as well as the laity, but also of divine beings, *satthā deva-manussānaṃ*. He is renowned as the 'torch-bearer of mankind' (*ukkādhāro manussānaṃ*). He was "born for the good and happiness of humanity" (*manussa-loka-hita-sukhāya jāto*). The beginnings of the Buddhist movement lay in the Buddha's keen concern for the freedom and happiness of human beings living in the world. There would have been no Buddhism had he withheld his great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), which was one of the corner-

stones of the Buddhist movement. And compassion is a social emotion, a human virtue. It has to be practised in the world of beings.

A movement which moves society is a social movement. And Buddhism has definitely moved society wherever it spread in the course of its long history. For thousands of years it has moved men and woman to a higher life, to noble truths and deeper principles; it has inspired races and peoples and nations to develop art and literature, morals and manners, science and philosophy, and to build patterns of civilization and forces of peace. The history of Buddhist civilization has been the result of Buddhist social ideas and ideals which are not all ascetic or monastic.

Recently Melford E. Spiro has advanced the view that there are "three systems of Theravāda Buddhism", viz., "nibbānic Buddhism", "kammatic Buddhism" and "apotropaic Buddhism." By the first system he means Buddhism of those who aspire directly to Nirvāṇa; by the second system he understands Buddhism as practised by those who aspire to a favourable rebirth and happy states in heaven. The third "system", according to him, is "concerned with man's worldly welfare: the curing of illness, protection from demons, the prevention of droughts and so on."[36] This view is based on his study of Buddhist communities in Burma during the days of U Nu. His standpoint is anthropological and "reductionist." We may observe in passing that these so-called three systems are three facets of one system—Theravāda Buddhism. They are interrelated. Those who aim at Nirvāṇa, do not, perhaps cannot, remain indifferent to the welfare of those who aim at a favourable rebirth. Contrariwise those who follow the so-called karmatic religious life treat those who aspire to Nirvāṇa as the proper "field of merit." The worldly welfare of human beings cannot be divorced from transcendental concerns, either of the monks or of the laity, so that tasks such as curing illness, overcoming droughts and famines etc. are common concerns of all grades of Buddhists. Even the Buddha is known to have discussed the problems of life with kings, ministers, generals, traders, craftsmen, priests and all kinds of householders. As A. K. Warder remarks, "there is a general underlying assumption that beyond the immediate aim of individual peace of mind, or more probably in essential connection with it, lies the objective of the happiness of the whole of human society and the still higher objective of the happiness of all living beings."[37]

It may be pointed out that the lay Buddhist also contributed significantly to the growth of Buddhist ideas and practises. The rise of the powerful schools of the Mahāsāṅghikas and Sarvāstivādins resulted in important secularising developments. These were matched in the Theravāda tradition by the popularity of the *Apadānas* and *Jātakas*. At the same time stūpa architecture and related sculpture presented a fresh area of concrete religious activity in which monks as well as the laity joined. Another area of social life in which this co-operation was meaningfully employed was that of the education of monks as well as the laity. Its centres were monastic schools and colleges in which the monks were the teachers not only of religious doctrines and texts but also of secular arts and letters.

The Buddhist community of casteless and classless monks exerted important influence on Indian society in general. The Brāhmaṇical leaders and authors were obliged to introduce the ascetic life as the fourth stage (*saṃyāsa-āśrama*) in the theory of *āśramas*. The provision of *vikalpa* or option to embrace *saṃyāsa* or monastic life even without going through all the preceding three stages was made possibly due to the popularity of *pravrajyā* or "going forth" in Jaina and Buddhist circles of Indian society. The tenet of redeeming one's debt to one's fathers (*pitrs*) by producing sons was however never given up by the Brāhmaṇical tradition.

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[36] *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes,* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971) pp. 11–12.

[37] A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 157.

A fundamental tenet of Buddhist socio-moral ideology was that all beings are bound by their karma. It is the deeds of a person which determine his or her fortunes in this and the next life. The doctrine recognised the freedom of every person to select a way of life suitable to his or her equipment. In other words it is one's inner worth and moral excellence, purity of life and nobility of character, control of mind and the senses and an insight into the real nature of things, in short, progress in the triple, training of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā* which determine one's superiority over others. No distinction of birth or caste, colour or sex, was of any value so far as one's higher or holier life and its ways and means were concerned. This was a revolutionary doctrine from the standpoint of the Brāhmaṇical tradition which zealously guarded the legend of the divine origin of castes and their duties.

Buddhism made profound impact on Indian social life in several ways. Its leaders and teachers continuously criticised the theory of castes and ridiculed the false claims to superiority based on birth (*jāti*) and colour (*varṇa*). On the other hand, Buddhism opened the doors to higher religious life and the highest goal for all those who sought them, including the members of the lower strata of society. Although Buddhism was not concerned with the abolition of castes, it did oppose the caste-system and repeatedly taught the evils of casteism. Another aspect of Buddhist social contribution was towards the emancipation of women from social inhibitions. Buddhism, along with Jainism but unlike Brāhmaṇism, gave equality of opportunity in religious culture to women. Some of the female members of the earliest ascetic order known to history were the Buddhist *Therīs* whose religious poetry has come down to us in the *Therīgāthā*.

Another aspect of Buddhist contribution in ancient India lay in the area of social harmony and racial integration on a national scale. It was through Buddhist influence and teaching of social harmony and tolerance that foreign invaders such as the Greeks, Sakas, Pahlavas, Kuṣāṇas and Hūṇas who came to India and settled here, in the course of centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian era, were assimilated by Indian society. This was a permanent contribution to social integration and national growth and it could not have been so easily accomplished in a strictly Brāhmaṇical scheme of social gradation without the wholesome effects of the Buddhist disregard for *varṇa*-organisation and respect for the liberty of the individual. We are of the view that had Buddhism been a living force at the time of the Turkish invasions, the problems of Hindu-Muslim communal discord in mediaeval and modern India would not have taken such a strong turn as they did. Because of the revival of the traditional Brāhmaṇical social scheme, reinforced with fresh religious injunctions, and because of the decline of Buddhism in India after the tenth century CE, the mass of early mediaeval Islamic followers in India could not be assimilated and digested by Indian society. Arnold J. Toynbee has rightly remarked that "If either Buddhism or Jainism had succeeded in captivating the Indic World, caste might have been got rid of. As it turned out, however, the role of universal church in the last chapter of the Indic decline and fall was played by Hinduism, a parvenu archaistic syncretism of things new and old; and one of the old things to which Hinduism gave a new lease of life was caste."[38]

The Buddhist message of social equality and communal harmony had left a deep impression on the mind of the Indian people which continued after the transformation of the classical Buddhist movement. A number of instances in the myths and stories of the *Mahābhārata* reveal that moral and intellectual attainments carried greater prestige than mere birth in a Brāhmaṇa family. The Bhagavadgīta, while stating the theory of the divine origin of four castes (IV. 13) nevertheless teaches that the wise people are impartial towards a learned and disciplined Brāhmaṇa, the cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste (V. 18). The task of fighting the evils of

[38] *A Study of History* (abridged by D. C. Somervill) Vol. I, New York, 1969, p. 350.

casteism and untouchability was continued by the Buddhist *siddhas*, the adepts in Tāntrika culture, during the early mediaeval centuries. A large number of these siddhas came from lower caste families, but their greatness was assured by their success (*siddhi*) in esoteric culture (*sādhana*). This mission of social reform was then resumed by the saint-poets of the *bhakti* movement throughout the Middle Ages. Though these saint-poets (*sānts*) were generally speaking within the fold of the Brāhmaṇical Hindu religious tradition, yet they revolted freely against many fundamental dogmas and authentic customs of traditional Brāhmaṇism. Their social and moral teachings were more in keeping with Buddhism than with Brāhmaṇism. All of them disregarded the rules of the *varṇa-āśrama-dharma* scheme and attacked social distinctions based on birth and profession. Many of them were born in *sūdra* families. They became exalted through their pure character, sincere devotion and magnanimity. The saints of Karṇāṭaka and Mahārāṣṭra, viz., Basaveśvara, Jnāneśvara, Nāmadeva, Rāmadāsa, Tukārāma and Ekanātha, were all against casteism and ritualism. Likewise the saint-poets (*sānts*) of North India, viz. Caitanya, Rāmānada, Kabīrdāsa, Ravidāsa, Guru Nānak, Dhannā, Sena, Pīpā, Dādu and the Muslim *Sufis*, were equally strong critics of the Brāhmaṇical scheme of castes and rituals. The social reforms initiated by the Buddhists and continued by mediaeval saint-poets were finally legalised and accomplished (at least in theory) by the government of the Indian Republic in 1949.

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